

Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 222-223.

A NOTE ABOUT SELF-STIMULATED SEX (MASTURBATION)

Readers may notice, in covering biblical prohibitions in the area of sex, that we have said nothing about any prohibition referring directly to masturbation, the practice by which a person brings himself or herself to orgasm without anyone else involved. This is because even though the Bible lists many prohibitions relating to sex, it says nothing about self-stimulated sex per se.

In the past, some Christians have tried connecting masturbation with God's anger against Onan because "whenever he went into his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother" (Gen. 38:9). But Onan did not stimulate himself. Rather, he had sex with a woman and withdrew on reaching orgasm, so the reason God got angry seems to have had more to do with getting enjoyment from sex with a woman without keeping promises owed to his brother than with *how* Onan went about avoiding his duties.

Because the Bible says nothing directly about self-stimulated sex, many have decided the practice must be moral or should at least be treated as something morally neutral—neither right nor wrong but simply allowed when better forms of sex are not available. But I do not think this is correct, and I disagree mainly because the very nature of masturbation conflicts with biblical thinking on sexual morality in some very important ways.

Of course, we should not make up demands that restrict sex beyond what God requires. Jesus was terribly critical of religious teachers who "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger [they offer nothing helpful]" (Matt. 23:4). But, while we should respect this important warning, we must also be careful to stand and defend all that God requires. I believe that, even though there is no specific prohibition in the Bible against self-stimulated sex, we are not left to merely do as we please because God has a lot to say about resisting passions of the flesh, and all morally worthy sex has to conform with the seven positive principles addressed in chapter 7.

For example, in scripture we are told to "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14); to "not be conformed to this world" but rather to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2); and "to abstain from the passions of the flesh" because they "wage war against your soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). Furthermore, those who belong to Christ "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24), and are urged to

“walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other” (vv. 16-17).

Also, I believe it is quite clear that solitary, nonrelational, shallow, self-focused, nonproductive, one-dimensional, single-gender, self-stimulated sex opposes every positive moral characteristic revealed to be essential in God’s design for sex.

God made sex to be *relational*, but solitary, self-stimulated sex is never relational. God made sex to be something *exclusive*, but while solitary self-stimulated sex is exclusive physically, it is not exclusive to another person and it encourages thoughts to wander in ways that are not exclusive at all. God made sex to be *profound*, but solitary self-stimulation is shallow. God made sex to be *fruitful*, but solitary self-stimulation treats sex like a commodity rather than a capacity for production. God made sex to be *selflessly* God-centered, but solitary self-stimulation is self-centered and self-satisfying. God made sex to be *multidimensional*, but solitary self-stimulation separates physical sex from everything else.

Perhaps most seriously, God made sex to be a joining of *complementary* sexual differences, but solitary, self-stimulated sex never involves corresponding sexual union. Male passions are aroused by a male himself, and female passions are aroused by a female herself. Solitary, self-stimulated sex is not only nonrelational, but is also by nature an act of same-sex arousal and same-sex fulfillment. You are always the same gender as yourself, and imagining a heterosexual relationship does not make the reality heterosexual. Of course, imagining a heterosexual relationship is better than imagining a homosexual relationship, but the reality only actually involves one gender.

Self-stimulated sex may be less seriously outside God’s design for sex than, say, physical adultery, or prostitution, or even sexual immodesty. But I believe we still must conclude that it is outside the biblical pattern and is therefore wrong. It is not a sort of behavior that merely falls short of the best but is nevertheless morally acceptable. It cannot be reconciled with God’s order to “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14), and it truly conflicts with every moral essential in God’s view of sex. So, even though there is nothing in the Bible directly prohibiting self-stimulated sex, I believe it is something we must avoid in order to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).